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BIBLICAL HISTORY AND LITERATURE AS A COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT

A Survey of the Past and the Present Situation by
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Paper Read at the Annual Meeting of the Religious Education Association, Rochester, New York, March 11th, 1921.

This paper covers centuries of educational history and requires twenty minutes for reading. The miracle of surveying so wide a field in so short a time is partly accounted for in that some things are omitted, but chiefly on the principle that a short horse is soon curried.

This is but another way of saying that as a college entrance subject in the United States, Biblical History and Literature does not bulk large now and has never done so in times ancient, mediaeval or modern. As a college entrance *requirement* it does not bulk at all.

From their founding, Harvard, William and Mary, Yale and Princeton required for admission Latin and Greek and Latin and Greek only. Columbia, Brown and Williams required from the first Latin, Greek and Arithmetic and Yale added Arithmetic to her requirements in 1745. It was not until 1830 that Geography was generally recognized by institutions of that day as an entrance requirement, while Columbia did not require English grammar until 1860 and Harvard until 1866. Between 1856 and 1870 Geometry was added to the entrance requirements of Yale, Princeton, Michigan and Columbia. It was during approximately the same period that History was thus recognized by leading institutions. Physical Geography was not found in the entrance subjects of Harvard or Michigan until 1870. It was during the last quarter of the nineteenth century that French and German and the sciences were added to the entrance subjects of the leading institutions. Even now science and history are considered as entrance electives, not requirements, in many American colleges. Within recent years there has been growing recognition of a large group of vocational subjects as electives among the more progressive institutions.

In many high schools today the number of subjects offered reaches sixty or more, Bible not being one except in the rarest instances, while colleges and universities, particularly state

institutions, publish units acceptable for admission to the number of from twenty-five to fifty.

It is quite manifest therefore that a general sweep of the eye is sufficient for the historical survey of our subject and that we may address ourselves at once to current practice.

In 1917 a Commission of the National Education Association on the Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools made an elaborate report.* This Commission was composed of thirty members who were heads of Departments of English in high schools, normal schools and colleges, school and college teachers of English, librarians, field men, county superintendents, deans and principals. In addition to the membership of the Commission there was a Reviewing Committee of twenty-six members, who were representative educators in all phases of teaching and administrative work. The report was the result of several years of study on the part of these experts. As a part of the report they published twelve pages of recommended books for students of the secondary period—the seventh to the twelfth grades, inclusive—in which there is not a single reference to any Old or New Testament writing. This report was adopted by a number of institutions of higher learning as a basis for entrance work.

Quite different is the attitude of the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English, which designates certain readings from different types of literary production. Under the head of "Classics in Translation" this conference lists first "The Old Testament, at least, the chief narrative episodes in Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Daniel, together with the books of Ruth and Esther." These recommendations appear verbatim in many college catalogs of various types. Among them being Smith, Wellesley, Vassar, Mt. Holyoke, Vermont, Kentucky, Missouri, Rutgers, Northwestern, Harvard, and Chicago.

The attitude toward Biblical History and Literature of the College Entrance Examination Board is also friendly although the Board does not formally set examinations in this subject. Assurances have recently been given by members of the Board that questions in Bible will be prepared and submitted whenever

*Bulletin U. S. Bureau of Education, 1917, No. 2.

schools which make extensive use of the questions apply for such. In the meantime the Board has been in the habit of citing selections from the Bible in its "Readings" in Literature, and it sometimes suggests Bible stories among its topics for compositions.

Many institutions which heretofore have relied on examinations as the sole plan for admission are now announcing as an option a "New Plan" which provides for an examination in a limited number of designated subjects and the acceptance of the certificates of accredited schools for the balance of the admission requirements. This gives schools which desire to do so the opportunity to give proper emphasis to Bible study with the implied assurance that if the work is satisfactorily done, it will be duly accredited for entrance. To do this matter full justice it should be said that some institutions reserve the right to exclude certain subjects at their option even though offered by preferred schools.

Several institutions advertise Bible as an elective for entrance to the extent of a unit or a half unit, as for instance, the University of Chicago, Columbia, Iowa and Maine. Columbia's requirements* are based on the recommendations of the Committee of Fifteen, composed of Biblical instructors in American Colleges and secondary schools. They are as follows:

- a. The epic narrative of the Old Testament: a knowledge of the chief characters and incidents presented in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth I and II Samuel, I and II Kings and Daniel.
- b. The memorizing of some of the more notable passages of biblical prose and poetry.
- c. Hebrew history from the Egyptian period to the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth in 70 A. D.; development of the life and institutions of the Hebrew people with some consideration of their contributions to human culture.
- d. Early Christian biography, the life of Jesus and his early followers; the parables of Jesus; the life of Paul.
- e. Introductions to the English Bible; how the Bible and its separate books came to be, and how they have come down to the present time.

*Entrance Examinations and admission, 1921-1922, Page 27.

For several years the University of Chicago has advertised four courses in Biblical History and Literature as available for one-half unit or one unit of entrance credit. Text books are recommended for each of these courses.* The courses are:

1. The History of the Hebrews from the Exodus through Nehemiah's Reforms.
2. The Life of Jesus.
3. Old Testament Literature.
4. New Testament Literature.

The University of Maine allows a half unit or a unit elective for entrance to their schools of arts and sciences, agriculture and technology.

Another group of colleges make a possible provision for the inclusion of Bible even when it is not definitely listed, as at Boston University, which announces "a candidate may offer two units not included in the lists of options, if the credits are recommended by his principal and the courses are acceptable to the Committee on Admissions."

There is a large number of colleges and universities which accredit schools rather than students or subjects and which in addition to stipulated entrance units accept any subject taught by those schools. In general, this is the practice of the great state universities of the Middle West. Usually all the colleges of the state in which this method is pursued follow the example of the state university. In the Indiana University catalog, for illustration, is found this statement: "For the elective portion of the entrance requirements any subject taught in a commissioned high school and credited by such high school as part of the regular four years' course will be accepted."

Several state boards of education have granted high schools permission to allow credit on work in Biblical Literature and it is possible under certain conditions to include this work automatically in the college entrance certificate. Illustrations of this are found in Maine and Indiana.

The catalog of Mount Holyoke, to take a concrete case as illustrating the best development of this work up to the present time, (1) publishes in its section on Admission, the Classics in Translation of the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English, (2) announces one unit of Bible under

*Circular of Information, 1919, page 26.

"free electives" making specific reference to the Definition of a Unit of Bible Study by the Commission of the Council of Church Boards of Education, and (3) designates the time for a College Board examination in Bible at the opening of the academic year.

There are certain conclusions that may fairly be reached with reference to this subject.

1. The era of the expression of righteous indignation and holy horror that other classical literature is taught in our schools and Biblical Literature is ignored is happily passing. The method of eloquent rhetoric and loud oratory is at last being supplemented by practical administrative guidance and actual teaching.

2. The chief responsibility rests upon the schools, not the colleges, for the extension of Bible study as an entrance subject. More and more the colleges are recognizing work well done by the schools as meeting the admission requirements. Less and less are they stipulating specific subjects. As the matter stands now, secondary Bible study has all the liberty it knows how to use. Biblical literature is recommended for reading in many colleges, it is listed as a free elective in others, it may be used as an option even when not listed in some, it may be included in the course of any accredited school. Even when the old plan of admission by examinations is relentlessly enforced without alternative, we find the College Entrance Examination Board informally recognizing Bible study, and there is evidence this recognition will become formal when there is sufficient justification for this action.

3. The standardizing agencies share some of the responsibility for the development of this work. They should define units of Bible study. They have already defined units of far less promising subjects. They work not in the interests of the subjects. They are not professional promoters. Their business is not propaganda. They work in the interests of the children, of the schools, of Americanism. So long as the name and wisdom of Abraham Lincoln are revered and the Gettysburg address, every word of which but three is found in the Bible, is recognized as an English masterpiece, there will be justification for the study by American children of the world's greatest piece of literature.* A few colleges now are withholding recognition

*NOTE—On March 17th Dr. Thomas F. Holgate, of Northwestern University, presented the desirability of such a definition as is here recom-

of the Bible as entrance work because these definitions have not been made or recognized by the standardizing agencies.

4. It may be added that while any time is opportune for work of this kind, the present is especially golden. We are in a period of reconstruction *par excellence*, reconstruction political, social, industrial, religious, educational. Never was there such need for estimating real and lasting values. This work of reconstruction will soon begin in the field of college entrance requirements. It has already begun with vocational subjects. "Sooner or later," President Burton said in his last annual report at Minnesota, "the entire problem will have to be given fundamental consideration." Let it be hoped that when that time comes, educational statesmanship will be equal to its opportunity.

In the July, 1919, issue of CHRISTIAN EDUCATION* there is a partial report of the Commission of the Council of Church Boards of Education on the Definition of a Unit of Bible Study for Secondary Schools.

This definition has been approved by various universities and colleges here listed with the understanding that work done in conformity with the conditions set forth in the Definition will be accepted as a free elective unit for admission. In view of the fact that the standards of this Definition are higher than those officially approved in the states of Indiana, Iowa and Maine, the universities and colleges of those states are put in the same list with those which have specifically approved the Commission's Definition.

Under date of March 21, 1921, Dean Rothrock of Indiana University, wrote:

"Indiana University will accept credit for the elective units in Bible Study as authorized by the State Board of Education. This work should serve a very noble purpose in the high school curriculum and I hope that high schools may avail themselves of this worthy privilege for introducing the study of Biblical literature in their curriculum."

mended, to the Commission on Unit Courses and Curricula of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The Commission appointed a committee to make the necessary investigations and to present a report with an approved course of study and approved educational standards at the next annual meeting of the North Central Association.

*This definition will be furnished on request.